

Update on Fire Services Management Committee business

Purpose of report

For discussion.

Summary

The report contains updates on current and recent work activities within the FSMC.

Recommendation

Members to note the update.

Action

LG Group officers to progress actions as appropriate.

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Report from the Fire Services Management Committee

Background

1. The Fire Services Management Committee met on 16 September 2011 at Local Government House. Alongside the LG Resource Review (reported in item 3 of this agenda), the following issues were discussed:

Civil Disturbances

2. The Committee praised the work of FRSs across the country during the August riots, including brigades in London, West Midlands, Merseyside, Greater Manchester, Wiltshire and Avon. Members formally acknowledged the speed and quality of the response of the brigades as well as the commitment and professionalism of firefighters attending, despite facing great personal risk.
3. Chairman Coleman informed Members that a Victims and Communities Panel had been set up by government to look at the impact of the riots. He urged Members to engage quickly with the panel if invited by them as the timescale for their initial report was November 2011.
4. The committee expressed concern over the reported attacks on fire engines and crews. A press release in support of firefighters was issued by the LG Group over the summer on behalf of Members.
5. The Committee noted the release of the Recovery Scheme Grant to assist local authorities and fire authorities with direct costs incurred as a result of the public disorder. Councillor Coleman emphasised that any authorities who had received a letter regarding issues such as overtime payments and damage to vehicles might be entitled to funding.

Firefighters' Pension Schemes

6. James Dalglish, Head of HR at London FEPA, attended the Committee to update Members on government reforms to the firefighters' pension scheme and CLG's consultation which closes on 2 December 2011. Members agreed that the LG Group should write to FRAs to secure their views on the Government's proposals, in order to provide evidence to support the LGA position. The results of this information-gathering exercise will be brought back to the FSMC.
7. Members spoke against proposals to extend access to full commutation for staff who retire with less than 30 years service, saying that this could potentially

encourage senior firefighters to leave earlier and prove very expensive and that any change to the rules should be a cost to central government rather than individual FRAs.

Peer Challenge

8. Cllr Kay Hammond set out the interim conclusions of the FRS Peer Challenge working group which was set up to develop a proposed method for the new fire peer challenge. Issues discussed by the group included ensuring the competency of peers going into authorities and clarifying the training provision for Members and Officers.
9. In light of the LG Group's plan to offer each Fire Authority one peer challenge between now and 2014, the paper recommended reconsidering what peer competencies should exist and the best way to provide quality assurance to councils.
10. The Committee agreed that assessors need to have relevant and up to date knowledge of Fire Authorities and be sensitive to their needs. While the current system allows authorities to vet the profiles of teams put forward to them in advance, Members felt more work needs to be done on finding out the experience of assessors on LG Group lists.
11. Where poor performance existed, Members advocated greater involvement from Lead Peers throughout the challenge process, including giving peers consistent feedback and identifying quality assessors. Cllr Hammond said that the working group would meet with the leads in the coming weeks to discuss their findings and consider next steps.

Date of next meeting

12. The next meeting of the Fire Services Management Committee will take place on **Thursday 17 November 2011 at 11am** in **Local Government House**.